

Superficial/Superficial Technology Artist Statement

Technology has undoubtedly transformed the face of much of the modern world – from news dissemination, to consumption, to communication, nearly every aspect of our lives includes some aspect of digital, robotic or big data tech.

Yet somehow, society as a whole does not seem to be benefitting. For example, [in the States, suicide and poverty rates](#) have risen in the past 20 years. Meanwhile, addressing problems that only face the small technocratic population of Silicon Valley and major cities has become a [trope](#) in American pop culture. This societal disconnect has led to unprecedented time, resources and money devoted to “solving” superficial “[problems](#)”, while substantive problems that actually affect the average person’s life are largely ignored by the tech community.*

Through Art-A-Hack Summer 2016, our team explored two aspects of the superficial/substantive disconnect:

- Deep understanding of a superficial problem overshadows real societal problems being addressed.
- Superficial understanding of a real societal problem overshadows real solutions being addressed.

Our team created two primary digital outputs – an app and a virtual reality (VR) experience. The fake, satirical app, titled “Pump It Up”, aims to “solve” Africa’s problem of a lack of potable water by allowing a user to customize and buy parts of a water pump to ship to the continent. Through a VR experience that is meant to serve as stand-in for a real-life humanitarian effort to build water pumps, the app user can then see how their parts are used in the field to “solve Africa”.

To frame the overall experience, we created a fake start-up pitch deck to show how our fake company’s team was inspired to start the effort. We purposely built the app, VR experience and framing materials to emphasize the fake company’s priorities lay in a deep understanding of the relatively superficial problems of the marketing position, user experience and design aesthetics. Meanwhile, the fake team had zero understanding of the challenging African context and what it takes to really solve the complicated problem of potable water access.

We hope this experience drives the point of the global tech community needing to refocus its efforts on problems that actually need solving. As the June 2016 Brexit vote demonstrated, major portions of the population have not benefitted from the tech industry revolution and the face of the modern economy. If global tech does not start working to inclusive, equal societies, more dramatic political and economic moves are likely to follow.

*For the purpose of this project, our definition of a substantive is a solution that aims to further or help people realize their basic human rights, as defined by the UN Declaration of Human Rights.